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## THE NEXUS BETWEEN MADRASA AND POLITICS: ANALYSING POLITICAL ROLE OF MADRASAS IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

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### **Abstract**

*This article analyses political role of madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan from a historical perspective to see how they have played key roles in shaping political and strategic agendas of state and non-state actors in South Asia. Consequently, this undertaking adopts the historicist approach in which it will emphasise the importance of madrasa history in order to understand historical changes and demonstrate their potential role as tool to exert political and strategic interests of state and non-state actors in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It argues that although madrasas are generally considered as centres for Islamic religious education, their roles vary amongst countries with different forms of social, cultural, and political structures. This paper concludes that in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan - under the tense political and strategic pressure of regional and international powers - where Islam depicts social, cultural, and political identities of Muslims, some madrasas play a key role as potential tool to exert political and strategic interests of state and non-state actors.*

Keywords: *Madrassa, Politics, State, Strategy, Non-State actors.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States (US), books, articles and magazines written on the subjects of Islam and madrasa occupied the shelves and desks of Western and non-Western scholars, politicians and strategists. The conviction that the 11 September 2001 (hereafter 9/11) terrorists attack were carried out by Muslim radical militants attracted the world's, and especially the West's, attention to the religion of Islam and its role in Islamic societies. Moreover, people in the Western and non-Western world started questioning and debating about any possible link between madrasas and terrorism. Notably, in the context of accusing madrasas as being centres for training radical religious terrorists, the first analysis coming from the media (particularly Western) which identified madrasas as a threat to

international security (Berkey, 2007, p. 40; Henfer, 2007, p. 1; Zaman, 2007, p. 61). Nonetheless, debates on madrasas are not unprecedented; indeed, since the Western domination in the fields of education, politics and international affairs, there has been ongoing debate amongst Muslim scholars on the role of madrasas in Islamic society, particularly on the issues of reform and modernization of the traditional concepts, methods and principles of Islamic pedagogy.

This article focuses on changing role of madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in relation to the way in which some madrasas have become politicized to serve policies and strategies of state and non-state actors. In order to support this argument, this undertaking will look at what is meant by madrasa and what kind of role do madrasas generally play in the Islamic world. It will then follow with assessing on what kind of impacts did British colonial rule have on the traditional roles of madrasas in the Indian subcontinent and how have madrasas responded to Western supremacy in knowledge, science and international affairs. Following this it will examine whether madrasas reserve their de facto importance as surrogates in proxy warfare, as they did during the Cold War, in Pakistan and Afghanistan or have reinstated their traditional role as education centers will be addressed in later part. Here it is important to note that in this article madrasas disregard gender differences (male or female madrasas) and refer to all those institutions that provide Islamic religious education.

This undertaking is based on analytical research framework. It will primarily use secondary source of literature. The most important reason for relying on secondary literature is due to historical analysis of the changing role of madrasas in the Islamic world. This is important to understand how madrasas, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan, played key role motivating political movements and violence and also in shaping the strategies and policies of states throughout history. Consequently, this paper adopts the historicist approach in which it will emphasise the importance of madrasa history in order to understand historical changes and demonstrate their potential role in politics and violence.

## **MADRASAS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: BACKGROUND**

For any significant discussion on madrasas, one must understand what is meant by madrasas and also must have knowledge of their historical context in Islamic society. Thus, it is important to give a sort of Islamic epistemological understanding and historical background of the madrasa before analysing its role in the contemporary Islamic world. Islamic epistemology is based upon the Quran and Sunnah (Prophet's tradition). Explaining the importance of the religious ontology, tenets, and Islamic worldview, Seyyed Hussein Nasr, Professor of Islamic Studies, George Washington University, in an interview with *Journal of Religion - Adyan*, stated that "religion in its universal dimension and... teachings provides crucial help in gaining ...total reality of the natural environment and...help us... solve... crisis at hand (Nasr, 2013, p. 9). He further elaborated that the very existence of the universe and "its very detail ... [is] sign that God has placed in nature precisely to help us to remember him" (Nasr, 2013, p. 8). According to Diallo (2012, p. 175), Islamic epistemology, in practice and theory, "remained intrinsically tied with Islamic education tradition." However, this does not mean to say that Islamic education is merely based on religious curriculum; rather, in addition to religious subjects, madrasa curriculum includes Arabic language (semantics, literature, poetry,

morphology) and science subjects (astronomy, anatomy, botany, meteorology, logic) (Diallo, 2012, p. 176). In the context of Islamic epistemology, the very existence of the universe, knowledge and philosophy is rooted in the divinely inspired scripture of Quran. According to the Quran, it is a guide for people, “hudan lin nas”, (2:185).

The term *madrasa* is derived from the Arabic word *darsa*, meaning lesson. Technically *madrasa* means centre of education or school. According to Manjurul Haque, the glossary definition of *madrasa* is the “place at which the act of imparting lesson is performed” (Haque, 2103, p. 11). In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the term *madrasa* is defined in both modern and medieval usage. The term *madrasa* in medieval usage referred to mainly religious college of law, whereas, in modern usage, it refers to colleges or higher institutions where subjects of Islamic science are taught (Bearman, et al., 2000, pp. 231-232). However, in respect to modern usage of the term *madrasa*, there are different perceptions between Arab and non-Arab Islamic countries. In the Arab world, including Iran, which is a non-Arabic nation, the term *madrasa* is applied for both general and/or religious educations. In non-Arabic countries, particularly in South Asia, the term *madrasa* refers to institutions that impart religious education. Given the fact that Muslims practice compulsory religious duties, *far’d al-ayn*, and *sunnah*, on a daily basis, such as praying five times a day, fasting for one month during Ramadan (the 9th month in the Islamic calendar), and performing funeral prayers and so on, there is a requirement for each Muslim to have basic religious knowledge. Thus, even in most of the taught curricula in general education in the Islamic world, there is at least one compulsory subject of Islamic studies, *Islamiyat* (Islamic studies) that imparts basic Islamic knowledge. For example, the national curriculum in Pakistan includes one compulsory subject of Islamic studies in primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary education (Nordic Recognition Information Centres, 2006, pp. 9-10). In the same way in Afghanistan, the national curricula comprise one compulsory subject of Islamic studies, *diniyat*, theology (Samadi, 2001, pp. 40-45). In addition to basic religious knowledge, these subjects, *Islamiyat*, or *diniyat*, instruct students how to read and recite the Quran.

Traditionally, Islamic religious and non-religious education were not separated as different institutions, in fact they existed as one institution. However, there were two forms of knowledge in *madrasa* education, “the transmitted (*naqli* or *manqul*) and rational (*aqli* or *maqul*)” (Sikand, 2008, pp. 43-51). The *naqli* or *manqul* imparted Quran exegesis, *ahkam – ul – Quran* (legal content of Quran), *hadith* and *fiqh*. On the other hand, *aqli* or *maqul* dealt with mostly non-religious and scientific studies, such as mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, letters, semantics and poetry. In relation to the ways in which early *madrasas* taught these subjects, Hefner (2007, p. 6) stated that the pedagogies in early *madrasas* were performed in informal study circles known as *halqa*, (circle) which took place under the supervision of *shaykhs* (scholars) in places such as *madrasas*, mosques and/or private homes. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the *halqa* method of pedagogy has remained as one of the most used ways of instruction, particularly in present Afghan and Pakistani *madrasas*.

Throughout the history of the Islamic world, the Muslim leaders considered *madrasas* as a very important institution capable of changing the social and political character of an Islamic society. According to Henfer (2007, p. 8) “Kings, viziers, and...elites patronised *madrasas* to demonstrate their own high standing and to ensure that the message coming from the scholarly community remained friendly” (Henfer, 2007, p. 8). In fact, in the context of social

structure, politics and religious ideology madrasas began to play an important role between the 8th and 9th centuries. During this time, great Muslim theologians and philosophers such as Noman Bin Thabit (well known as Abu Hanifa) emerged who followed a different methodological analysis, interpretation of Quran and Sunnah, to traditionalists in Hijaz. Abu Hanifa relied on “Quran, the Sunnah...ijma (consensus), qiyas (analogical reasoning), istihan (legal preference), and al urf (custom) (Ramadan, 2009, p. 54). Iraqi scholars inspired by Abu Hanifa’s works followed his way of thought (Ramadan, 2009, p. 41). As a result, a new school of thought, known as Hanafi Mazhab, (Hanafi Sect), developed in the 8th century, which, according to Ramadan, was known as a school of opinion (ahl – al – ray), and was different to traditionalists who were led by Malik Bin Anas (better known as imam Malik) in Hijaz (Ramadan, 2009, p. 41). Madrasas in Iraq mainly followed Hanafi school of thought, whereas, in Hijaz, madrasas’ pedagogy was based on Maliki school of thought. Amongst the students in Hanafi and Maliki madrasas, Ahmed Bin Muhammad Bin Hanbal Abu Abdullah Al – Shaybani (better known as imam Hanbal), and Abu Abdullah Muhammad Bin Idris al – Shafi’I (better known as imam Shafi’i) emerged as well-known Islamic scholars and theologians who interpreted Quran and sunna under distinct school of thoughts, which influenced Muslim scholars in the Middle East, North Africa and became the third and fourth mazhabs, respectively. Throughout the early eras, particularly from the late 8th century onwards, madrasas played an important role in presenting legal diversity in Islamic law, dividing Muslims politically, socially and religiously under distinct sects.

Diversity in Islamic law and jurisprudence expanded over time, particularly after 730, in that followers of distinct schools of jurisprudence competed to control the central political power in the Islamic empire (for example, there were a series of rebellions between Kharijiyah (those who first supported Ali, the Prophet’s cousin, authority, but later denied) and Shia in Mecca, Medina and Iraq) (Esposito, 1998, p. 17). Although, there were a series of revolts that changed the ruling powers from the Ummiyyads Dynasty, led by Muawiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan, between 661-680, centred in Syria, to the Abbasid Dynasty (run from Baghdad, Iraq), Islamic geographies continuously expanded and Muslims relatively lived in peace, rituality, tolerance and quest for knowledge. Nonetheless, in the later period, particularly after the 17th century Muslims of different schools of thought, tribe and background fought for greater political power. The decline of the Islamic world and the emergence of a powerful West was a sign of a paradigm shift in international politics in the early 18th century. According to Esposito (1998, p. 43) the decline “reversed the relationship of the Islamic world to the West – from...expanding offensive movement to a defensive posture.” The Islamic world’s response to the Western domination was diverse, some decreed holy war, jihad, (for example, in the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan) calling “cooperation with the West or adaptation of its culture as betrayal and surrender” while others followed the West in modernising their politics, law and education (Esposito, 1998, p. 44).

It is important to emphasise that after the Western domination in international affairs, particularly in knowledge and advanced science, the educational reform in Islamic world took place in two ways. The Islamic states, such as Turkey and Iran that Western imperial powers had failed to colonise followed the Western model of education. For example, Sultan Abdülhamid II, the ruler of the Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1909, merged the European model of educational programmes with the conventional Ottoman educational system (Islamic

studies and Ottoman history) in Turkish madrasas (Henfer, 2007, p. 14). However, after the declaration of the Republic of Turkey on 29 October 1923, by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the entire religious pedagogy was eliminated from general education (Henfer, 2007, p. 15).

The rise of Western industrialisation, which started with the British Industrial Revolution in the 18th century (Dean, 1996, p. 14) not only transformed economies, societies and politics in Europe, but also, in respect to education, it was a paradigm shift that changed the centre of education and knowledge from the Islamic to the Western world. According to Phyllis Dean, the British Industrial Revolution was rooted in transformation of state power from totalitarianism (king, religious leader, Puritan, Catholic) to “English aristocracy”, which was known as the Glorious Revolution, which resulted in the establishment of a new form of government, in which decisions of national interest (economic, implementing legislation, waging wars) were taken by the House of Commons, an elected body (Dean, 1996, p. 20), not the king or a religious leader. This development detached religion from politics in Britain. The rest of Western Europe, such as France and Belgium, followed the British industrial path. By 1913, states outside the European boundaries, such the US, Russia and Japan, had acquired industrial techniques and brought essential reforms to their constitutions in order to compete with the advanced European states (Frieden, 2007, p. 59). The revolution came with the arrival of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent in the late 18th century. In this context, most of the Islamic nations failed to acquire technological advancement, particularly in restructuring and reforming political and educational systems. Nonetheless, some Islamic countries, such as Turkey and Iran, found educational backwardness and flaws as reason for their defeat by the advanced West. However, in countries such as India Muslims believed that “Muslim decline had been believers’ neglect of God’s law” (Henfer, 2007, pp. 17-19).

The British colonisation of the Indian subcontinent, according Haque (2013, p. 12), meant the devastation of the “social, economic, cultural and emotional domain of Muslim communities [and in the context of education the reform in madrasa was the] bitter taste of change.” It is important to note here that the British control of the Indian subcontinent was not a bloodless transformation of power from Muslim rulers to English colonial powers. Rather, Muslim scholars and ulema attempted a failed revolt by decreeing jihad against the British occupying forces in 1857 (Noor, et al., 2008, p. 15). According to Henfer, this divided Muslim scholars into two groups and some started appealing to incorporate to “European arts, science, and etiquette [whereas others such as Ahl-i-Hadis, rejected to cooperate with the British] insisting that the only path forward was a...commitment to the law... of Quran and Hadith (Henfer, 2007, p. 19). For Muslim modernists in the Indian subcontinent, Islamic decline was “a sign that Islam was not being correctly understood and practiced” (Esposito, 1998, p. 55). To adapt to the new environment, madrasas were forced to “reorganise dramatically” (Bano, 2007, p. 48). Those who incorporated with modern advanced European science adopted a Western style of education. For example, Sayid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) founded the Scientific Society in 1864 and established Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh 1874, which was modelled on Cambridge University (later named as Aligarh Muslim University in 1920) (Esposito, 1998, p. 55). Further, Khan published *Tadhib al-Akhlaq* (Refinement of Conduct), which provided “modernist Islamic perspectives on a wide range of subjects” (Esposito, 1998, p. 56).

In the same way, some reformists, such as Shah Wali Allah and Shah Abdul Aziz, who rejected medieval interpretation (Esposito, 1998, p. 90), formed a new madrasa under the British Empire, known as Dar –ul – Uloom, built in 1867 in Deoband town (today the madrasa is better known as Dar – ul – Uloom Deoband or Deobandi madrasa), in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh India (Noor, et al., 2008, p. 15). Notably, one of the important madrasas that reorganised its pedagogy and curriculum based on the Western model was Nadwat – I – Ulema in Lucknow. According to Esposito, Nadwat – I – Ulema was one of the leading madrasas in India that “accepted British patronage and even tried to integrate Western discipline into their traditional Islamic curriculum” (Esposito, 1998, p. 90). However, it is important to emphasise that there was a distinction made during the colonial era between religious and non-religious education, the former known as “personal” and the latter as “public or general” education (Alam, 2002, p. 2124). According to Alam, the colonial judgement of religious school as personal resisted government control over madrasas; this kind of phenomenon served the interests of ulema as “they were able to engage in the hegemonic representation of the masses [and also provided madrasas with the authority to control or] exercise power and hegemony over Muslim masses in India” (Alam, 2002, pp. 2124-2126). Since then, once again, madrasa have started playing a greater role in Muslim communities in the Indian subcontinent.

The Deobandi madrasas were, academically, the most important and politically the most significant in South Asia (Zaman, 2007, p. 63). Although, in a short period of time, Dar – ul – Uloom Deoband became one of the prestigious centres for Islamic studies with fast growing branches all across the Indian subcontinent, some Muslim scholars were opposed to adopting a Western system of education or importing a foreign syllabus into madrasa curriculum and remained opposed to reform based on two particularly important understandings. First, Ulema consider Islam “ultimate truth” and believe that madrasas had produced renowned scholars throughout history, thus, any reform is “regarded as sign of weak faith and ...straying from the path that the elders of the past have trod”; second, they see reform “as interference in ...their own territory” (Sikand, 2008, pp. 33-34). British colonial rule intensified already existing religious sectarianism amongst Muslims in South Asia. According to Zaman (2007, p. 63) “new Westernised Muslim elites were more suspicious of ulema than were the colonial officials, [and] ulema saw themselves as ...religio-political leaders.”

However, Indian Muslims’ incorporation with the British waned with the incident wherein the British rulers destroyed a place used for ablutions before praying in the mosque in Kanpur in 1913 (Esposito, 1998, pp. 90-91). Some ulema propagandised the incident as “Islam in danger” and decreed for jihad against British colonial rule (Esposito, 1998, p. 91). In addition, this incident amalgamated ulema of different schools of thought and madrasas along with Westernised Muslim elites to form a united political movement against the British Raj. Notably, in this regard, one of the first institutional supports came from the Jamiat i-Ulama – I – Hind (The Organisation of Indian Ulema) (Esposito, 1998, p. 92). Thus, in the context of the first political movements for Indian independence, it can be said that madrasas played a key role in political movements against British colonial rule. In other words, madrasas were important institutions for awakening and motivating Indian Muslims under religious rhetoric of advocating revival of a caliphate in the Indian subcontinent and defending Islam against British colonial oppression.

However, after the British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent in 1947, madrasas became completely detached from Indian politics. A resolution passed by Jamiat i-Ulama – I – Hind and the first Education Minister of India, Abul Kalam Azad, a Muslim scholar and politician, declared that Muslim organisations, including madrasas, “would be religious, cultural and educational” (Metcalf, 2007, p. 92). In the absence of an Islamic state, madrasas preserved their autonomous states, fearing that any affiliation with and interference from Indian states would endanger the Islamic norms, culture and identity. Absence of official engagement resulted in the development of diverse schools of thought and Islamic orientations. According to Metcalf (2007, p. 94), most of the madrasas in India are linked to a distinct sect, such as Deobandi or Ahl – I Sunnat wa’l – Jama’at, Ahl – I hadith, Ahmadi, Ithna Ashari (Twelvers), and Ismailis. This is not to say that all madrasas are not unregistered, there are a few madrasas, particularly those that have adopted a modern system of pedagogy, such as Jamia Islamia in Varanasi, and some of the Ahl – I Hadith madrasas, that are registered under the Indian Board of Education (Metcalf, 2007, pp. 96-97). In present India, registered madrasas (registered with the Board of Education) pursue a similar general school syllabus alongside the religious pedagogy. Those students who want to continue with religious education enrol in Dar – ul – Ulums and Jamiyas (names applied to some higher religious institutions in some regions of India, such as Kerala (Metcalf, 2007, p. 98) and those who would prefer to continue with scientific non-religious education enrol at the universities. Although, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, madrasas in India, likewise in other Islamic countries around the world, attracted attention, particularly from the media, suspecting madrasas as centres for training jihad and Islamic terrorism, contemporary madrasas in India generally remained as institutions that provide basic education (religious and non-religious) with the aim to preserve Islamic identity and culture (Metcalf, 2007, pp. 91-100).

## **ROLE OF MADRASAS IN PAKISTAN**

Religious language, symbols and slogans, such as “Islam in Danger” and the traditional battle cry “Allahu Akbar” become an integral part of the Muslim League’s political ideology and rhetoric. Local religious leaders and mosques played an important role in bringing the mass of Muslim peasants and artisans into the Pakistan Movement (Esposito, 1998, p. 96).

Prior to the British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent, madrasas remained a focal point of religio-political rhetoric to pursue political objectives for the Muslim politicians and religious leaders. It is important to note that Indian ulemas had not unanimously supported the notion of creating a separated nation state for Indian Muslims. Some Muslim scholars, such as Abul Kalam Azad, denounced the notion of nationalism, saying that it contradicts the idea of “Islamic universalism” (Esposito, 1998, p. 94). However, a fair number of the religious scholars, particularly from the Deobandi group, supported the political movement under the All India Muslim League to create an independent nation state for Indian Muslims. Finally, under a massive religio-political movement led by the Jamiat –e – Ulema – e – Islami, a separate Deobandi group that supported the Pakistan Movement, and the All India Muslim League, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was created as a nation state for Indian Muslims on 14 August 1947. This phenomenon resulted in the newly independent Islamic Republic of Pakistan receiving a large number of Deobandi madrasas at the time of the Partition (Bano, 2007, p. 49). It is important to discuss the potential role and importance of religious identity, as well as the

role of religious institutions, in the process of state building in the newly independent nation of Pakistan. In contrast to India, Pakistan's religious scholars, ulema, preserved their de facto role in the politics, society and cultural identity of Pakistan. According to Esposito (1998, pp. 117-118), religious leaders and secular politicians and policymakers debated for nine years to draft the first national constitution of Pakistan in 1956. Some of the remarkable provisions of the constitution were: the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is based on Islamic beliefs, thus, the head of state must be a Muslim (Part IV, Article 32); reforming Islamic society under Islamic principles (Part XII, Article 97); and "no law contrary to Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet could be enacted (Article 198)" (Esposito, 1998, p. 118).

Political and social identity in Pakistan developed alongside the power struggle between secular and religious parties. Pakistani modernists and seculars have always tried to establish a secular authority to govern the state. Notably, there were some attempts by Pakistani leaders, such as that by President General Ayub Khan (1958 – 1969) to reform the constitution, known as Constitution 1962, in which Islamic provision was omitted from the Republic of Pakistan (Esposito, 1998, p. 121). However, an angry backlash from the public, forced policymakers to redraft this as the Constitution of 1963 in which Islamic provision was restored (Esposito, 1998, p. 121). In the same way, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was the President (1971 – 1973), and later Prime Minister (1973 – 1977), of Pakistan attempted to control madrasa under reform initiatives in which non-religious subjects, such as English and mathematics, were supplemented in madrasa curriculum (Bano, 2007, p. 50; Zaman, 2007, p. 77). Although Pakistan had inherited its governing institution from British India, it failed to pursue a Westernised secular path. Notably in this context, the failed attempts to modernise Islam by Bhutto and Ayub Khan, the most influential leaders in Pakistan's political history, and follow a secular path was an example that showed the potential role of religious leaders in Pakistan's politics. According to Bano (2007, p. 50), the state of Pakistan avoided clashing with ulema, "who commanded respect within certain constituencies." This phenomenon coerced political leaders to demonstrate political policy, and their party agendas, under religious justification. For example the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) policies, such as nationalisation and land reform, were advocated in the religious language of "Musawat-i-Muhammadi (the Equality of Muhammad) and Islamic Musawat (Islamic Equality)" (Esposito, 1998, pp. 172-173; Mandaville, 2007, p. 170). This shows how madrasas and their affiliates, ulema and shaykhs, had established a strong cadre in legislation, policymaking and the political affairs of the country. Thus, in contrast to India, ulema and their associate madrasas have been playing a key role in building the culture, society, strategy and political identity of Pakistan. One of the important developments in this respect was the formation of the Islamic political parties, such as Jamiat – e – Ulema – e – Islam, and Jamiat – e – Ulema – e – Pakistan, which, according to Esposito, provided "organised outlets" for Pakistani ulema (Esposito, 1998, p. 120). Under a grand religious campaign led by JI against the secular Bhutto in the 1977 election, a united religious political movement called the Pakistan National Alliance was formed. Although Bhutto won the election, the religious rebellions demanding for "true Islamisation," continued even after the elections (Mandaville, 2007, p. 172). These religious movements fostered a bloodless martial law by the military in 1977. This part is important for the purpose of this paper, given the empowerment of Islamism, particularly in the context of the formation of hundreds of new madrasas under different schools of thought and their role in the domestic and foreign policies and strategies of Pakistan.



General Muhammad Zia – Ul – Haq, who was appointed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, as Chief of Army Staff in 1976, was well known for his personal piety and strong affinity with Islam. In a military coup d'état in 1977, General Zia– Ul – Haq came into power in Pakistan. Under General Zia's rule, Pakistan's cultural, social and political identity transformed drastically. Moreover, Zia's policies continuously influenced Pakistan's society, culture, religion and politics over the coming decades. Zia's doctrine, "System of the Prophet" or Nizam-i Islami (Islamic Order), attracted religious leaders, in particular JI, who zealously supported Zia's Islamic agenda. Under Nizam-i Islami doctrine, Zia imposed some fundamental religious laws, such as Shari'ah Courts being formed to observe and verify whether the laws constituted were in accordance with Islam, such as Zakat (2.5 % tax) levied from all bank accounts in Pakistan; Islamic studies became mandatory at all levels of education (Esposito, 1998, p. 176; Mandaville, 2007, p. 172). According to Rizvi (2000, p. 166), in press conferences and media interviews, General Zia clearly declared that "he would not hand over power as long as the mission of Islamisation and moral renewal of the country was not completed." Ahmad Rashid, a renowned Pakistani journalist and author, finds Zia responsible for the present instability in Pakistan in his book, *Descent into Chaos*, he states [T]he militancy of the religious parties, the mushrooming of madrasas and extremist groups, the spread of drug and Kalashnikov culture, and increase of sectarian violence took place during the Zia era (Rashid, 2008, p. 38).

Two important events in 1979, the religious revolution in Iran that brought religious leader Rohullah Moosavi Khomeini to power and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, transformed the fortunes of Zia's regime overnight. The West turned a blind eye to Zia's dictatorship, poor human rights record and his clandestine nuclear weapons programme, under the potential necessities of a Cold War strategy (Rashid, 2008, p. 39). The US Secretary of State, George Pratt Shultz, in his memo to President Reagan, wrote that

President Reagan should "endeavour to convince Zia of his personal interest in these concerns and his sensitivities to Zia's view" Shultz added "We must remember that, without Zia's support, the Afghan resistance, key to making the Soviets pay the price for their Afghan adventure, is effectively dead (cited in Coll, 2004, p. 62).

As a result, Zia received carte blanche from the US to manoeuvre politics, and religion, including supplying arms to Afghan's religiously motivated guerrilla fighters (Afghan Mujahedin) (Coll, 2004, p. 63). In addition, General Zia received \$ 3.2 billion military and economic aid from the US (Rashid, 2008, p. 38). The religious support at home and international support under the Cold War politics led General Zia to seem, on the one hand, a close ally of the West and, at home, a charismatic strong leader. General Zia, along with the chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lieutenant-General Akhtar Abdul Rahman Khan, choreographed a religious war, a so called Afghan jihad, against Soviet infidels. Under this plan, madrasas mushroomed, particularly along the Afghan borders. The madrasa curriculums "were designed to provide religious endorsement for armed struggle in the defence of Islam", which led hundreds of thousands of Afghani and Pakistani students to participate in jihad against the Soviet and Afghan communist forces in Afghanistan (Zaman, 2007, p.71' Ashraf, 2012 p. 19). According to Coll (2004, p. 61), General "Zia embraced jihad as a strategy...[he considered] "the legions of Islamic fighters on the Afghan frontier...as a secret tactical weapon." As a result, madrasas became a potential tool to exert the political and strategic

interest of Pakistan and its Western allies during the Cold War strategies. Nonetheless, Pakistan, regardless of the Cold War politics, was using Islam as a tool for its Afghan foreign policy. Religiously motivated policy towards Afghanistan was a strategy led by Pakistan to distract the notion of Pashtun nationalism, which was a source of a protracted irredentist claim on Pakistan by Afghanistan.

However, internationalisation of the jihad under the Cold War strategy, amplified the strategic impact of the West-supported Pakistani policy in which the religion of Islam was used through distinct madrasas to recruit radical Muslims from all around the world. According to Rashid (2001, p. 130), about 35,000 Muslim radicals from the Middle East, North and East Africa, Central Asia and Far East Asia came to join the Afghan jihad between the 1980s and 1990s. This phenomenon expanded the role of madrasas as important academies that issued jihadi rhetoric and religious justification of wars under the interests of various state and non-state actors. Notably, some of the illustrious leaders of radical religious terrorist groups, such as Osama bin Laden, Tohir Yoldoshev, Juma Kasimov (better known as Juma Namangani) and Ayman al Zawahiri, emerged under the notion of Islamic jihad against Soviet communism. Although, the above stated terrorist leaders were not madrasa graduate religious leaders, such as Laden, who had graduated from the school of public administration and economics (Coll, 2004, p. 86), they used madrasa as a tool to disseminate their version of Islamic ideology. Significantly, this was not consistently applied to all Islamic madrasas in the region.

Following the independence of Pakistan, the number of madrasas grew from a couple of hundred to thousands (Borchgrevink, 2011, p. 4), even hundreds of thousands if one counts the maktabas, which are present within each mosque. Notably, some of these madrasas were places to train religiously motivated radical extremists and fighters in the different wars in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Bano, 2007, p. 50; Berkey, 2007, p. 490). Since Afghanistan has furnished ground for all religiously motivated wars for decades, from the 1970s to the present day, this paper will now move on to discuss the importance and potential role of madrasas in Afghanistan.

## **ROLE OF MADRASAS IN AFGHANISTAN**

Afghanistan was a crossroad for different civilization; dynasties such as the Achaemenids, Alexander of Macedon, Baktarians and Kushans came across, conquering the vast lands of the Middle East, Central and South Asia (Dupree, 1977, pp. 26-35). Remnants of these civilizations formed a heterogeneous society in Afghanistan. Islam arrived in Afghanistan in the 7th century and, later, Afghanistan served as home to Islamic empires such as Ghaznavid (10th to 12th century) and the Turks of Central Asia, (13th to 14th century) (Singh, 2007, p. 17). Notably, during Ghaznavid and Central Asian Turkic rule, cities such as Balkh, Herat and Ghazni had become home to some of the best-known madrasas in Islamic history. These madrasas produced renowned Muslim theologians, philosophers and poets, such as Hakim Sanai (during the Ghaznavid era, 11th century), Khawja Abdullah Ansari and Maulana Jalaludin Rumi, known as Jalaludin Balkhi in Afghanistan (13th n century) (Samadi, 2001, p. 25).

Islam depicts the social, cultural and political identity of Afghan societies. About 80% of Afghans belong to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence of the Sunni sect and rest are the followers of, mainly, Jafari and Ismaili schools of jurisprudence of the Shia sect (Roy, 1986, p.

30). These schools of thought, in contrast to Indian and Pakistani schools, were traditionally based on the sufi or tasawuf tradition (mystical dimension) of Islam (Roy, 1986, p. 30; Giustozzi, 2010, p. 181). Unlike the Deobandi School, sufis, ulema, pirs (holy man) and mullahs (also known as mawlawi) had traditionally followed the spiritual path of piety in Afghanistan. However, the way in which Islam was understood, preached and expressed was different amongst the ulema and mullahs of the different ethnic and tribal groups in Afghanistan. According to Roy (1986, pp. 34-35), “[t]hroughout Afghanistan, Islam is far from being a single system of norms.” In the context of Islam and its role in Afghan society, it would be pragmatic to divide Afghan societies mainly into two regions. First, the tribal regions mainly inhabited by Pashtuns, where societies are ruled under a cultural code of law, Pashtunwali (Pashtun brotherhood). In these regions role of Muslim clergies and shari’ah were futile (Roy, 1986, p. 35). Roy explained the difference as:

The tribal code is more democratic but more restrictive; it does not attempt to transcend the particularity of the group, but makes appeal to the consensus of the tribal community. As far as political life in Afghanistan is concerned, the tribal code tends to isolate the Pashtun community, while the shari’at, which does not recognise that ethnic groups have ultimate reality, envisages a more universal social order (Roy, 1986, p. 36).

Nonetheless, in recent days, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Pashtunwali tradition has changed to what Nabi Misdaq explained as an intertwined religio-cultural code where three of the fundamental codes of Pashtunwali “are yawalay, monotheism or belief in one God; paighamabary, prophethood or belief in the Prophet Muhammad, and qiamat/akherat or the day of judgement”, which are, at the same time, the fundamental beliefs of Islam (Misdaq, 2006, pp. 30-31). Second, in non-tribal regions, a general framework of law is practiced under Shari’ah law.

Although, since the late 18th century, Afghanistan has gone through different social, economic and political changes, madrasas and maktabas have preserved their de facto traditional role as centres of education in the contemporary era. Likewise, in India and Pakistan, maktabas in Afghanistan instruct basic religious education, such as reading and reciting the Quran or memorising it, and madrasas impart higher religious pedagogy. Religious education in Afghanistan is divided into two types: Dar ul Hifaz, which instructs memorisation of the Quran, and a madrasa, as in Pakistan and India, which imparts higher religious pedagogy (Borchgrevink, 2010, p. 16). Madrasas and maktabas were the only source of education in Afghanistan until 1920, when King Amanullah introduced a modern Westernised system of education into the country (Borchgrevink, 2010, p. 16). However, the state’s role in the provision of education to people has remained modest and very limited. Although, the “Constitution promulgated (Article 20 and 22) in 1931 made primary education compulsory for all Afghans” (Samadi, 2001, p. 29), there were very few or no schools available for Afghan children to attend. For example, by 1950, there were only seventeen secondary schools established throughout the country (Samadi, 2001, p. 41). Moreover, “[b]y 1940, with an estimated population of ten million people, there were 60,000 pupils in 324 schools [, modern Westernised,] with 1,990 teachers throughout Afghanistan... [after ten years in 1950 the number of students barely reached to] 95,3000” (Samadi, 2001, p. 10). Samadi’s conclusion that internal political instability, issues of multi-culturalism and economic restraints were some of the main obstacles for the development of education in Afghanistan (Samadi, 2001, p. 9)

may have been true, but it should also be noted that, during Muhammad Zahir Shah's rule, which lasted for forty years (1933 – 1973), Afghanistan was a peaceful country, particularly in its domestic affairs (Rasanayagam, 2003, p. 25). Thus, there was little effort to modernise the system of education in Afghanistan compared to neighbouring countries in the region.

In the absence of general schools (state run education), particularly in rural areas, which constitute about 80% of the population (Samadi, 2001, p. 14) maktabas and madrasas have become the only available centres for education. Which is not to say that madrasas or maktabas were the only centres to impart religious education, rather they were “socio-cultural centres” (Borchgrevink, 2010, p. 25). Thus, historically, there has been strong association between communities and madrasas. In other words, madrasas and maktabi were social and culture representatives of villages and localities in rural areas in Afghanistan. Moreover, ulema, sufis, mullahs and religious scholars, particularly since the first Afghan-Anglo wars (1838-45), have been playing an important role in politics (for example, they played an important role in the wars against foreign intrusions as well as in inter-tribal or inter-ethnic wars) and in the process of state building in Afghanistan (Rasanayagam, 2003, p. 10; Giustozzi, 2010, p. 181). Also, in respect to provision of education by madrasas, particularly maktabas, it would be a mistake to say that maktabas are generally well-appointed with professional highly skilled ulema, scholars of Islamic science or teachers. In fact, mullahs, particularly in the rural areas, are not part of any establishment rather they are chosen by the local villagers based on their piety and traditionally belonging to a mullah family (Roy, 1986, p. 32). Notably, the mullahs performed multi tasks (social and religious), such as leading the five times daily prayers (imam), arbitrators whenever there is crisis, conducting marriages, performing burial prayers and imparting Islamic education (Roy, 1986, p. 32).

Given the important role of religion in the social, cultural and political affairs of Afghans, the madrasa education system in Afghanistan has developed and been “shaped by cultural and political settings” (Borchgrevink, 2010, p. 25). From a political standpoint, religious circles in Afghanistan have been playing an important role in shaping not only social and political identity, but also playing a key role in leading rebellions, violence under the rhetoric of protecting Islam and pan-Islamism. These movements were not limited against foreign intrusion. In other words, to protect Islam against infidels; rather they were continuously conducting opposition to any state attempt under a modernised Amir (leader) to adopt Westernisation. For example, Habibullah Kalkani (known as Bacha-ye Sqqao) a religious leader and murid (disciple) of pir Shams – ul Haq Mujaddidi Kohestani led a successful revolt against the modernist reforms of King Amanullah (1919–1929) in 1929 and took control of the state power and established Islamic shari'ah law in the country (Roy, 1986, pp. 66-67).

The attempts to develop and modernise the education system led the state to establish new schools and madrasas across the country. For example, between 1930 and 1940, the state set up new madrasas throughout the country, such as Dar – ul – Uloom Arabia in Kabul, Fakhr ul-Madaris in Herat, and Madrasa-I Asadiya in Mazar-I Sharif (Olesen, 1995, p. 187 cited in Borchgrevink, 2010, p. 17). These madrasas performed like secondary schools and, for higher religious education, the Faculty of Shari'at was established at the University of Kabul in 1951 (Roy, 1986, p. 45). However, the education development programme did not encompass rural areas (Borchgrevink, 2010, p. 22). In remote areas, madrasas and maktabas were built and financially supported (collecting zakat and ushr, crop tax, one tenth of the agricultural yield) by

peasant villagers. Thus, throughout the modern history of Afghanistan most of the community in rural areas were stagnated and deprived of basic education services. Since Islam is considered 'absolute' and capable of creating its own jurisdiction, law, education, politics, social and cultural identity, without relying on any establishment or state, madrasas and makhtabs led by unqualified mullahs created a desired version of Islam in rural Afghanistan. As a result, unknowledgeable mullahs who are charismatic trustworthy leaders have become useful tools for the political and strategic interests of state and non-state bodies. This fact inevitably means that the mass population, particularly in rural areas, are potential powers that can be motivated under religio-political movements in the cause of different political and strategic interests, such as using jihad as a tool to contain Soviet expansion in South Asia.

Before moving on to the next part, it is important to shed light on the role of religious education for Muslim females. Notably, throughout the history of madrasa, there was modest improvement for the provision of education for Muslim females in South Asian madrasas. Since our purpose under this undertaking is to examine the politicisation of madrasas as tools for the policies and strategies of state and non-state organisations, particularly in South Asia, we do not examine madrasas under a gender divide. Rather, this study focuses to account for all those madrasas, regardless of gender difference, that act as a tool for the policies of state and non-state forces. This will be discussed in detail in the following part.

### **MADRASAS: A TOOL FOR POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS**

As stated in the previous sections of this paper, Islam is a religio-political ideology. Thus, states throughout history have used religious justification to formulate and plan political and strategic interests. Bakircioglu, in his book *Islam and Warfare*, provides an excellent background to the war doctrine from the Islamic perspectives. He stated that,

Muslim rulers drew on religious justification for politically and/or economically motivated wars, largely because this eased the conscience of Muslim warriors, assuring them that the cause for which they fought was righteous (Bakircioglu, 2014, p. 46).

The turning point in the context of religious justification for politically and strategically motivated wars in the end of 20th century occurred under the Cold War politics in South Asia. In particular, this started with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979. The religiously motivated war against Soviet infidels predominantly gained ground amongst religious leaders, mullahs, ulema and madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In India, on the other hand, this movement did not gain popularity amongst Indian Muslims. The most important reason for this was that madrasas in India, since its independence in 1947, have generally remained limited to the provision of education. Although Indian madrasas played a decisive role in the political movements and revolts against the British Raj during the colonial era, they were quick to adopt a Western modernised system of education, considering it key to producing the modern Indian Muslim, who could compete with Hindu elites and revive Islamic values among the Hindu majority India (Rashid, 2001, p. 88). Given the importance of religiously motivated wars in the post-Cold War era, there have been a series of allegations by the Indian state and the media that Indian madrasas are centres for training religious militancy, particularly after 9/11 (Sikand, 2004, pp. 140-141). However, Indian madrasas have strongly condemned and denied these

allegations (Sikand, 2004, pp. 141-142). The Indian madrasas have generally remained detached from being a tool for state and non-state strategic and political interests, especially under the religiously motivated wars. In this context, Sikand (2004, p. 142), stated that “[t]o equate the Indian madrasas with the Deobandi madrasas in Pakistan...is...misleading, for the contexts in which they operate are totally different.” In Pakistan and Afghanistan, madrasas were used as tools to exert religiously motivated wars against Soviet troops during the 1980s and as well as in the Afghan civil wars in the 1990s (Rashid, 2001, pp. 89-91). In contrast, in the contemporary era, madrasas in India have remained detached from being a tool for politically and strategically motivated movements (Sikand, 2004, p. 143). Since the purpose of this article is to examine how madrasas are politicised to serve the political and strategic interests of state and non-state groups, contemporary Indian madrasas, in this context, will not meet the purpose this research. Consequently, discussion in the rest of the paper will be focused on those madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan that serve as tools for the strategic and political interests of state and non-state actors.

In order to control and produce ulemas friendly to the state, the government of Afghanistan sought to install the Deobandi system of madrasas education in Afghanistan in 1933 (Rashid, 2001, p. 88-89). In Afghanistan, unlike Pakistan, where Deobandi madrasas formed political parties (Jamiat Ulema – e – Islam and Jamiat – e – Ulema – I – Pakistan), the Deobandi madrasas failed to gain approval among Afghan religious circles. In contrast, Afghan religious scholars who had attended Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt (one of the most prestigious Islamic universities in the Islamic world) had become strongly influenced by the Egyptian religious radicals, such as Sayyed Qutb (Roy, 1986, p. 70; Coll, 2004, pp. 112-113). In this sense, it can be said that the roots of Islamisation in Afghanistan are to be found in the tenets of Egyptian Islamic radicals such as Qutb and Hasan al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood). However, the Islamic radicalisation that emerged in the 1970s in Afghanistan was formulated under the auspices of Pakistani Deobandi madrasas, which were not solely rooted in the narrow ideologies of the Pakistani Deobandi ulema; rather it was a policy tool for the clandestine political and strategic interests of different states at regional and international levels.

One of the renowned Afghan religious leaders, Mawlawi Yunus Khalis, a Haqqania madrasa graduate (one of the distinguished madrasas, also known as Dar – Ul – Ulum Haqqania, located in Akora Khatak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan) who owned madrasas inside Afghanistan (Rashid, 2001, p. 84), translated and published Qutb’s work, *Islam wa edalat – e edjtemay* (Islam and social justice) (Roy, 1986, p. 70). Following Khalis, Burhanuddin Rabbani, who graduated from the Al- Azhar University and was influenced by Qutb, also translated *Pointers to the Way* (Roy, 1986, p. 70). As a result, Afghan students (in madrasas and in the Faculty of Shari’at, University of Kabul) were indoctrinated by Qutb’s vision of Islam, which stated:

The function of this Divine system which is given to us- we, who are the callers to Islam- is to provide a certain style of thinking, purified from all those Jahili styles [, Western,] and ways of thinking which are current in the world and which have poisoned our culture by depriving us of our own mind (Qutb, 2001, p. 41).

This phenomenon fostered affinity between Pakistani Deobandi and Afghan religious circles. According to Rashid (2001, p. 86), Pakistani Deobandi madrasas were inspired by an

Egyptian Islamic organisation, Ikhwan ul Muslimeen (the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 in Egypt). Thus, under the Cold War politics, the Pakistani Deobandi madrasas infiltrated Afghan religious circles. Consequently, the Afghan education centres (madrasas, maktabas and the University of Kabul) became key to setting up political movements that triggered a series of religiously motivated sectarian violence in the country. According to Coll (2004, p. 111) students “confronted a choice; communism or radical Islam.” In 1972, religious scholars and ulema such as Rabbani and Gholam Niazi (an Azhar graduate), alongside their politico-religiously motivated students, set up a militant wing of an Islamic movement called Sazman – I Jawanan – I Musulman (Organisation of Muslim Youth) (Roy, 1986, p. 70). This movement embraced madrasas and mosques across the country. In the early 1970s, some of the main strongholds of religiously motivated sectarian violence were established in different madrasas and mosques throughout Afghanistan, such as Najmulmadares madrasa of Hadda in Jalalabad province, and the mosques of Jamal Mina and Pul – I Khishti in Kabul. According to Roy (1986, p. 72) madrasas led by local mullahs in Nuristan and Kunar provinces were “the most sectarian part of the [Muslim Youth] movement.” Given the religious affinities of Afghans with Islam, and, moreover, the autonomous authority of madrasas and mosques over the majority of the population in rural areas, the politico-religious movements gained ground across the country. According to Rais (1999, p. 3), madrasas played a key role in shaping Afghan political culture, which he defines as “[r]igidity, puritanism, glorification of martyrdom, [and] jihad.” This kind of phenomenon in Afghanistan fostered a series of political and strategic interests of different countries at regional (Pakistan and Iran, including Saudi Arabia) and international levels (the US and its allies) during the Cold War.

A secret plot by the Organization of Muslim Youth to overthrow the communist regime was exposed by Afghan security forces, as a result of which Islamists were forced to flee to Pakistan (Roy, 1986, p. 76; Saikal, 2004, p. 174). This situation provided Pakistan a remarkable strategic window of opportunity to contain Afghanistan’s provocative Pakistan policy, which embraced irredentist claims of Pashtunistan, to annex to Afghanistan or to create an independent state for Pakistani Pashtuns, as well as the repudiation of the Durand line as an international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Saikal, 2004, p. 175). The government of Pakistan, with the help of its Deobandi religious circles, particularly under the leadership of Maulana Fazlur Raham, leader of the Jamiat – e – Ulema Islam party, set up thousands of madrasa along the Afghan border. According to Rashid (2001, p. 89) the number of madrasa rose from nine hundred in 1971 to eight thousand registered and about twenty-five thousand unregistered private madrasas in 1988. In these madrasas, tens of thousands of Afghan and Pakistani students were religiously radicalised and trained to fight in Afghan jihad. Rashid stated that:

Neither teachers nor students [in these madrasa] had any formal grounding in maths, science, history or geography. Many of these warriors did not even know the history of their own country or the story of the jihad against the Soviets” (Rashid, 2001, p. 32).

The US, with its own strategic interests under Cold War politics, joined Pakistan’s covert war (training and religiously motivating Afghani and Pakistani students to fight against the communist regime in Afghanistan) in the late 1970s (Rashid, 2001, p. 18; Coll, 2004, p. 59). Later, between 1979 and 1980, Saudi Arabia and Iran also joined the Afghan jihad. Each supported a different religious school of thought. The former spent millions of dollars establishing madrasas advocating Wahhabism (Coll, 2004, pp. 81-88), (a radical Sunni

movement founded by Muhammad ibn Al-Wahhab, 1703-1792), which denounces sufism and, disapproving of the Shia sect, refutes rationality and calls for interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah in accordance to the Prophet's era (Esposito, 1998, pp. 36-37). The latter, on the other hand, advocated vis-à-vis by setting up a series of anti-Wahabi Shia madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Roy, 1986, pp. 146-147). As a result, over half a dozen religious Islamic factions were created and supported by different state and non-state Islamic charity groups (particularly from the Arab Gulf states). Each Islamic faction, aside from being a resisting force against Soviet and Afghan communist forces, were conduits for the strategic and political interests of regional and international states. For example, the Hizb-I Islami (Islamic Party) faction was led by Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; Jamiat Islami (Islamic Society), led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, was supported by Pakistan, Iran and, later India, (during the Afghan civil war); Hizb-I Islami Khalish (Islamic Party Khalis), led by Mohammad Younus Khalis, was supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; Ittihad-I Islami (Islamic Union), led by Abdulrab Rasul Sayyaf, was mainly supported by Saudi Arabia; and Hizb-I Wahdat Islami (Party of Islamic Union), led by Abdul Ali Mazari, was supported by Iran (Roy, 1986, pp.128-148; Saikal, 2004, pp. 210-213). The US unilaterally supported all factions through Pakistan's secret service, the ISI (Coll, 2004, pp. 59-70). Each Islamic faction had set up separate madrasas; maktabas and universities that instructed mainly religiously motivated jihadi pedagogy. The curriculum of these madrasas was designed and developed at the University of Nebraska under the auspices of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (Ashraf, 2012 p.19). Throughout this period, madrasas became conduits leveraging the political and strategic interests of regional and international powers.

With the arrival of Osama bin Laden and his Egyptian counterparts after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Coll, 2004, p. 84), a new phase of religious warfare started. In August 1988, an organisation came to be formed under Osama bin Laden in Peshawar, Pakistan, called "al-Qaeda al-Askariya (The Military Base)" (Jones, 2009, p. 73). Following this, local and foreign radical Islamist non-state organisations quickly formed and spread in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Madrasas expanded to embrace thousands of foreign extremist militants and provided recruitment bases for the multifaceted religiously motivated wars in the region. One of the important developments in this context was al-Qaeda's call for a 'World Islamic Front' in 1998, under which jihad became an "individual duty (Far'd al-ayn)" (Jones, 2009, pp. 76- 79). This decree transformed the nature of jihad and made it an international Islamic war against the West. Local and international non-state radical groups, such as Lashkar-I Taiba and Harakat ul-Mujahidin, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, in association with al-Qaeda, started engaging in military operations beyond Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indian Kashmir (Tomsen, 2011, p. 520). According to Jones (2009, p. 73), Al-Qaeda had "two components", the short term Jihadi embedded in Afghanistan and long term to recruit as permanent members and operate internationally. Under the context of 'World Islamic Front', al-Qaeda was able to successfully launch a series of terrorist attacks in the US in September 2001.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, the US strategic interests in South Asia were accomplished. However, madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan have preserved their de facto importance as surrogates to serve the political and strategic interests of Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia under the 'new-Cold War' politics in the region. In Pakistan, Deobandi madrasas have established links with non-state Islamist radical groups, which serve Pakistan's



interest in both Afghanistan and Kashmir (Withorp and Graff, 2010, pp. 18-19). According to Rashid (2001, p. 91), when Hekmatyar's Hizb-I Islami failed to safeguard the strategic and political interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan, the Taliban (students) emerged in 1994 as a new politico-religious movement to replace Hizb-I Islami. Saikal (2004, p. 219), called the emergence of the politico-religious Taliban movement, "Pakistan's creeping invasion." What is important to note about the phenomenon of the Taliban is that the madrasa reached its zenith as a tool for policies of state and non-state actors in the 21st century. The Taliban were students gathered from different madrasas in Pakistan to lead a new politico-religious movement in Afghanistan. Thousands of madrasas, including Haqqania Madrasa, from which most of the Taliban leadership graduated, have become key to provide recruitment to the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Rashid, 2001, pp. 91-92; Saikal, 2004, p. 221).

According to Cassidy, the rhetoric of Jihad in Afghanistan and Pakistan is, creed of death and destruction, prescribing what to believe about which god and condemning those who do not believe it. It relies on illiteracy, tribal mores, and misogyny to construct its myopic narrative (Cassidy, 2012, p. 90).

Assessing the link between education and militancy in Pakistan, Withorp and Graff emphasised that "education process and systems are often purposely... manipulated to influence conflict dynamic – usually to detrimental effect" (Withorp and Graff, 2010, p. 29). Radicalisation of an Islamic society under religio-political interests or instructing individuals with a radical and narrow worldview is likely to take hold in regions where education is scarcely available or provided under poorly scattered teachers. Over the last four decades, particularly since the start of the Afghan jihad, the "[r]eligio-political developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan have made the madrasa a vehicle for the promotion not only of sectarian worldviews, but also of specific ideologies and political agendas" (Borchgrevink, 2012, p. 78). For example, Pakistan used madrasas as a tool for policies to subdue Afghanistan and exert strategy to balance Indian hegemony in South Asia. In this context, Pakistan, through madrasa policy, is fighting two proxy wars on two fronts, Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir. Although the Pakistani President, General Pervez Musharraf, allying with the US-led 'Global War on Terror', took assertive strict measures to control religious militancy throughout Pakistan, Deobandi madrasas remained as an important tool to pursue foreign policy towards Afghanistan and India (Cassidy, 2012, p. 75). However, the emergence of new religio-political movements, Tehrik – e – Taliban-e Pakistan, (Movement of Students of Pakistan) in 2004 in Pakistan was a backlash to Pakistan's U-turn policy against al-Qaeda and its associate militants in the country. Madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan have become variable tools that are capable of meeting diverse political and strategic interests by providing the validities of desired interests under religious justification. Two of the most important reasons for this kind of situation in the context of South Asia are, first, the autonomy of the madrasa, which, according to Sikand (2004, p. 138), leaves madrasas open to be used by radical extremists and, second, the poetic structure of Quranic texts, which, according to Bakircioglu (2014, p. 66), can have ambivalent meaning if plainly interpreted. Thus, given the importance of mass uneducated populations with a strong affinity towards Islam, in remote areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, under the strong influence of unknowledgeable, trustworthy mullahs and ulema, the majority of the Muslims in these regions have become easy to be indoctrinated for personal or state or non-state strategic interests. According to Ramadan (2009, pp. 23-24) interpretation of Quranic text needs

professionalism in science, methodology, grammar, semantics and morphology. Since mullahs in local mosques and madrasas in rural areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan are graduates from madrasas with no scientific and out-dated curriculum, their position in local societies as strong authoritarian religious leaders leaves the entire village vulnerable to any religio-politically motivated movements.

On the other hand, Iran, a major player seeking for regional hegemony and political supremacy, particularly against Saudi Arabia, has been supporting Shia sectarianism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the same way, non-state actors, such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Taliban, use madrasas, maktabas and mosques as centres to advocate their mantra of "Islam or death" (Cassidy, 2012, p. 28). The creeds of radical movements (state supported or non-state actors) in the contemporary era are not confined to the preaching of jihad against infidels, including Christian and Jews; rather, it embraces all those Islamic countries or societies that have friendly relations with the West. According to Cassidy (2012,p.28), those who reject the extremist version of Islam are "considered apostates, outside the realm of Islamist true believers, and subject to all sorts of heinous atrocities." Consequently, it can be said that madrasas change their policies in accordance to the political developments in the region. In other words, madrasas are divergent in their discourses under state policies. For example, madrasas and mosques advocated jihad against Soviet infidels during the Cold War, which later changed into jihad against the West (particularly the US and Israel) and now, in the contemporary era, against all those states that are Western allies or have friendly relations with the West. In the same way, madrasas justify wars declaring apostate to their rival schools of thought. For example, Sunnis apostate Shia and vice versa. Religiously validated wars by madrasas against their states fostered the strategic and political interests of regional rival states. For example, a religiously motivated war by Tehrik – e – Taliban-e Pakistan, against Pakistan serves the foreign policies of Afghanistan and India towards Pakistan. In contrast, Afghan Taliban's contra-state military operations, as well as Lashkar-e Taiba and Harakatu – ul – Mujahedin-led insurgencies in Indian-controlled Kashmir, deliver Pakistan's foreign policy interests against Afghanistan and India. Recently, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have accused each other of providing sanctuaries for religiously motivated wars against each other. The former Interior Minister of Pakistan, Rehman Malik, accused Afghanistan of supporting religious radicalism in his country, saying that Afghanistan is providing safe sanctuaries for Pakistani Taliban who are fighting against the state of Pakistan (Georgy and Green, 2012, n.p.). In the same way, after a series of terrorist attacks in August 2015 in Kabul, Afghanistan, that killed tens of people and injured hundreds, the Afghan President, Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, said

I ask the people and government of Pakistan: if a massacre such as the one that occurred in Shah Shaheed [,Kabul,] had happened in Islamabad and the perpetrators had sanctuaries in Afghanistan, had offices and training centres in our major cities, how would you react? (cited in Mashal, 2015, n.p.)

## CONCLUSION

The generalisation of madrasas under one uniform school of thought would be untenable. However, disregarding the diversity of methods, concepts, curriculum and principles of

religious education in the contemporary Islamic world, it is important to understand what the contemporary roles of madrasas in Muslim societies are. It would be also a mistake to generalise madrasas as tools for the foreign policies of different Islamic states. Madrasas roles differ in accordance to the political, social, strategic and cultural structure of states. Madrasas, in Islamic countries or in Islamic societies in non-Islamic states with relatively peaceful environments, such as Malaysia, India, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan or Brunei, are generally centres for religious and Islamic scientific education. However, madrasas perform an inevitable political role in conflict-prone regions such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have been under the tense political and strategic pressure of regional and international powers. Additionally, people in both Afghanistan and Pakistan are strongly embedded in cultural and Islamic identities. This kind of phenomenon fostered madrasas to play a greater role in the social and political matters of the region, in addition to providing education to the people.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have remained as a focal point under state and non-state actors since the arrival of Cold War politics in South Asia. As a result, madrasas under religious tenet playing a greater role in the social cultural identities of both Afghanistan and Pakistan have become an important means to deliver the Cold War policies in the region. Some of the Afghani and Pakistani madrasas have turned into key tools to provide religious validation for the foreign policies of states as well as to deliver the political and strategic interests of non-state actors. Moreover, the decrees of apostate and takfir doctrine through mosques and madrasas in contemporary South Asia have made madrasa a variable tool to fit the diverse strategic interests of state and non-state actors in the region. In contemporary South Asia, some madrasas are not just proxies to deliver state led policies, but also tools to exert suitable agendas for anyone, anywhere under any political, religious or other interests. For non-state groups, such as al-Qaeda, the phenomenon of contemporary jihad is not limited within the boundaries of nation states. Such extremist groups proclaim the Western world and secular Islamic states as Jahiliyya (ignorance) and urge their followers to fight against Jahili styles and ways of thinking. Although, in general, not all madrasas advocate religiously motivated potential violence to deliver state policies or non-state strategic interests, a select number of madrasas, in so doing, have had a pervasive impact on the entire region and beyond under the globally connected social network system.

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